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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005190

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER WALKS BACK HIS THREAT TO CUT
COOPERATION ON IRAQ

REF: ANKARA 5140 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: FonMin Gul told the press Sept. 13 that if civilian casualties continue to mount in the Talafar operation, Turkey would end its cooperation with the U.S. on Iraq. Ambassador spoke with MFA Undersecretary-designate Tuygan and A/DCM with MFA's spokesman Sept. 14 to register our displeasure with Gul's comments, and Gul walked himself back in comments to the press later the same day. We do not believe Turkey's overall approach to Iraq has changed, but the GOT seeks a broader dialogue on the future of Iraq. End summary.

12. (C) According to Turkish press reports, upon his Sept. 13 return from a trip to the Baltic states, FonMin Abdullah Gul stated that the coalition operation in the northern Iraqi city of Talafar was harming the civilian, mainly Turkmen, population there, and he threatened that if this were to continue, Turkey would end its cooperation with the U.S. in Iraq. (Comment: Gul's statement was wholly inconsistent with what the GOT has been telling both the public and us. The Turks' line up to now has been that they recognize the necessity of the operation in Talafar, but urge that we can to end the operation quickly, minimize civilian casualties, and facilitate GOT efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the city (see refs). End comment.)

13. (C) A/DCM contacted Gul's spokesman, Namik Tan, Sept. 14 to seek clarification of Gul's statements from the previous evening. A/DCM emphasized to Tan that the FonMin's comments were inconsistent with both the private and public line the GOT has taken, and passed the message that Embassy Ankara and Washington were deeply disturbed by Gul's comments. Tan (protect) responded that Gul had made his comments at an event at which Tan was not present, and that he (Tan) had worked hard during Gul's Baltic trip to keep the minister on message. Tan went on to say that in his personal interpretation Gul was really speaking to two audiences: the Turkish people and the radicalized Arab world. Tan said that the GOT, including Gul, was feeling pressure from the Turkish people regarding the rising number of kidnapped and murdered Turkish truckers in Iraq. Additionally, Tan surmised that Gul was seeking to imply to radicalized Arabs that Turkey was distancing itself from U.S. Iraq policy. Tan told A/DCM in a subsequent conversation that he had spoken to Gul the morning of Sept. 14, shared the embassy's concerns, and advised him not to take such a tough line next time he had contact with the press.

14. (C) Ambassador then contacted Undersecretary-designate Ali Tuygan Sept. 14 to register our concerns and seek clarification: Was the GOT contemplating ceasing our cooperation on Iraq, including on humanitarian aid for Talafar? Tuygan responded that the GOT is not planning to do so, and indeed our cooperation was all the more urgent given the Turks' desire to get humanitarian aid to Talafar. Tuygan said that the Minister's statement was meant to highlight Turkey's overall concerns about Iraq, and was broader than just Talafar. He told the Ambassador that the GOT sought a wider dialogue on Iraq policy with the U.S.; he noted that we generally discussed only logistics and crises: kidnapped and murdered Turkish truck drivers, the Incirlik cargo hub, and now Talafar. Turkey shares the goal with us of a peaceful and prosperous Iraq, Tuygan emphasized. Ambassador registered the point, but also urged the Turkish embassy in Baghdad to avail itself of both the IIG and our embassy there.

15. (U) Comment: We are trying to correct the public record on Talafar, most recently when the Ambassador spoke to the press following his meeting with U/S Tuygan on Sept. 13 (see reftel). Ambassador emphasized that the operation was not aimed at the city's civilian population and that eyewitness accounts made clear that coalition and ING forces took "great care to minimize civilian casualties." Ambassador specifically took issue with characterizations by Turkmen sources of "genocide" and that 95% of Talafar had been destroyed. He urged everyone to operate on the basis of facts, not outlandish charges. He also repudiated the notion that TFO operations were intended to change the demographic balance in Talafar. He added that we are working with GOT authorities to get humanitarian assistance to Talafar. Ambassador's remarks were widely picked up in the Turkish press Sept. 14. We will seek other opportunities in the days

ahead to repeat this story.

16. (C) Comment, cont.: Namik Tan's counsel to his minister appears to have worked, as Gul moderated his line in a press availability the afternoon of Sept 14. He reiterated Turkey's desire for a peaceful Iraq, then added: "We conveyed our worries (on Talafar) to the U.S. at the highest levels, asking for utmost attention. They promised to do so. Our humanitarian aid to the region will continue."

17. (C) Comment, cont.: Whatever Gul's motivations--which we believe include fatigue from a foreign trip and ignorance of the high-level dialogue on Talafar we carried on with his ministry in his absence--Turkey's overall position on Iraq appears to be unchanged. It remains in our interest to continue cooperation on facilitating Turkish humanitarian aid to Talafar and to work through the issues on our mutual Iraq agenda (a unified, federal Iraq; trucker security; continued PKK presence in northern Iraq; Incirlik cargo hub). The GOT is under pressure from both the press and its people to disengage from Iraq, pressure that we need to counterbalance by reminding the Turks of their long-term interests and also by engaging them on their policy concerns. End comment.

18. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
EDELMAN